

## Communication within Operating Theatres – Multicenter Service Evaluation

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### Background

The drive for enhanced patient safety has led to the widespread implementation of surgical safety checklists(1). We examined aspects of theatre communication surrounding surgical safety checklists throughout our region, using a newly established trainee-led audit and research collaboration (SHARC).

### Methodology

We conducted a service evaluation across 7 hospitals over a 6 week period. Electronic data capture and paper forms were used to prospectively collect data from a large variety of theatres, spanning all major surgical specialties. The project was approved by all trusts' Clinical Governance and Information Governance departments.

### Data obtained from 392 Theatre Lists and 19 Surgical Specialties

### Results

Data was collected from 392 theatre lists covering 19 different surgical specialties. Formal team briefs were held in 85% of theatre lists. Only 58% of these had all medical members of the team present. Holding a team brief was not associated with a delay (>10min) in the start of a theatre list (32% with team brief vs. 37% without,  $p=0.47$ , Chi-squared test). Introduction by name and role occurred in 58%. Consultant anaesthetists and consultant surgeons knew each others' names in 93% (243/260) of theatre sessions, whereas only 30% (59/197) of trainee anaesthetists and trainee surgeons could name each other. The majority of anaesthetists (85%) found routine introductions useful and 74% would find it helpful to have a whiteboard with names and roles in theatre.



### Conclusion

Completion of a team brief and surgical safety checklist are widely established across our region. However, there is still a mismatch between our perception and the actual quality of these routine safety procedures, shown by inconsistent attendance at team briefs and poor rate of introductions, which form an essential part of the "time out" step in the checklists. Furthermore, trainees' knowledge of their counterpart trainee colleagues appears to be poor. The aviation industry places strong emphasis on their "first names only" rule, reducing potential barriers to effective communication(2). In the theatre environment, it is highly desirable to ensure knowledge of each colleague's name and role, particularly across the large and often complex teams. We therefore advocate the consistent use of whiteboards with all names and roles for all theatre cases.

"What is needed, however, isn't just that people working together to be nice to each other. It is discipline.... We are built for novelty and excitement, not for careful attention to detail. Discipline is something we have to work at."

- Atul Gawande. *The Checklist Manifesto*

(1) Haynes AB, Weiser TG, Berry WR et al. N Engl J Med 2009; 360 (5): 491-499.

(2) Lewis GH, Vaithianathan R, Hockey PM et al. Milbank Q. 2011 Mar; 89 (1): 4-38



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